



Special Political Fund Ballot Issue

FIRE FIGHTER



**Vote for
a voice!**

VOTE YES ... VOTE YES ... VOTE YES ...

**Members will shortly
be asked to take part
in a ballot to renew the
FBU's Political Fund.
The ballot opens on
15 October and closes
on 12 November.**

National Officer

John McGhee

**explains why you
should vote Yes.**

**Any member who has changed
their home address or wishes
their ballot paper to be sent to a
different address and has not yet
notified the union, should contact
John McGhee at Head Office**

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KEEPING the Political Fund is vital so that the FBU can continue to take workplace campaigns into the political arena – influence political decisions and have a say on changes in the law.

Winning a YES vote in the forthcoming ballot is therefore crucial to defend the rights the FBU has already won and to ensure that the Union can continue to campaign for new rights and improvements for members.

Ballot papers will be sent directly to members' home addresses on Friday 15th October, and should arrive shortly afterwards. A pre-paid envelope will be enclosed with the ballot and voting papers must be returned to the independent Scrutineer, Electoral Reform Services Limited, no later than the 12th November.

In the last round of ballots which took place ten years ago, unions voted overwhelmingly to retain their political funds – with 82% of members across the whole of the trade union movement voting YES. In this round, union members who have been balloted so far have once again voted overwhelming to retain their political voice.

This autumn other unions who will be holding ballots at the same time as the FBU are: the GMB, USDAW, CATU,



John McGhee
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CWU, BECTU and the rail unions RMT, TSSA and ASLEF.

Some members might ask why the FBU needs a political fund now the Union is no longer affiliated to the Labour Party. The reality is that much of the work the Union does is legally defined as being potentially 'political' and therefore needs to be paid for out of the Political Fund. Moreover, around one third of the unions in the UK with political funds, are not affiliated to any political party, including the FBU, RMT and teaching union NASUWT – yet all are required to hold review ballots to keep their political funds.

If the FBU was to lose its Political Fund, much of the work the Union does at national, regional and local level could be seriously hampered. Campaigns

MEMBERS FIRST

VOTE YES ... VOTE YES ... VOTE YES ...

CAMPAIGNING UNION

such as 'NO2 Fire Deaths'; the defence of Emergency Fire Control members; and the Union's IRMP strategy could be put in jeopardy. Even our ability to undertake bread and butter workplace campaigns to improve health and safety, for example, could be affected.

Following the Union's recent decision to disaffiliate from the Labour Party it is now more vital than ever that, the Union refocuses and revitalises its political strategy. Retaining the Political Fund is central to this work.

We must ensure that the voice of FBU members is heard and listened to in the corridors of power – lobbying, persuading and working with politicians and decision makers in Westminster, the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh and Northern Ireland Assemblies.

We must promote the FBU's vision of a Fire and Rescue Service to national politicians and local councillors – again much dependent on the Union retaining its Political Fund.

In essence however, the Political Fund is an insurance policy which protects the Union from falling foul of the law in carrying out much of its every day work. Fighting for better terms and conditions, protecting and improving pensions, working for equal

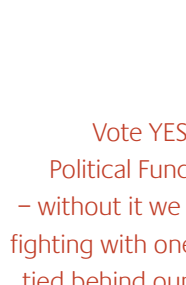


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A No vote would put in jeopardy campaigns such as 'NO2 Fire Deaths'; the defence of Emergency Fire Control members; and the Union's IRMP strategy



Following the Union's decision to disaffiliate from Labour it is more vital than ever that the Union refocuses and revitalises its political strategy



Vote YES in the Political Fund Ballot – without it we will be fighting with one hand tied behind our backs



opportunities for all our members as well as linking-up with like minded organisations on joint campaigns – these are all good reasons why we cannot afford to lose the fund.

Whilst the trade union movement will be working hard over the next few months to win the highest YES votes on the highest turnouts possible, the FBU also needs to be part of the campaign to ensure that this piece of unnecessary trade union legislation is repealed. The union will therefore be campaigning alongside the TUC and other unions to make sure that we are not forced to go through this bureaucratic, expensive and cumbersome exercise ever again.

However, our priority for now must be to win! Voting YES in the ballot, will not affect the right of members' to opt in or out of the Political Fund – this choice will remain – although I would urge all members to contribute to the Political as well as the General Fund. But a No vote could seriously affect the FBU as a campaigning union. It's been a hard couple of years for officials and members. Voting YES in the review ballot will help us rebuild, strengthen and grow.

Vote YES in the Political Fund Ballot – without it we will be fighting with one hand tied behind our backs!

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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is the Political Fund?

The law says that unions must have a separate Political Fund to spend on political campaigning. This could include a newspaper advertising campaign in support of public services, lobbying for better legal rights for workers, calling for support for the Fire and Rescue Service or holding a rally to improve health and safety protection. Members choose whether or not to contribute through a 'Political Levy'.

How much is the FBU's Political Levy?

About 15p a week

Shouldn't the FBU concentrate on defending members' rights at work?

That's exactly what the union does – seeking wage improvements, negotiating better terms and conditions, defending jobs, representing members at legal, medical and disciplinary hearings. But the decisions and laws made by politicians affect members' interests at work. Members rely on decent public services and a healthy economy for their livelihood. So the FBU must be able to campaign in the political arena.

Who decides how the Political Fund is spent?

The elected Executive Council controls how the money is spent. The Executive is accountable to members through Conference and ensures that, when money is spent, a clear benefit can be seen for FBU members.

What happens now the FBU isn't affiliated to the Labour Party?

Only a small part of the Political Fund was previously used to affiliate to the Labour Party. The FBU still needs a Political Fund to be able to campaign in the political

arena. This ballot is not about the FBU affiliating to any political party.

Why are we having a ballot?

Under a piece of legislation introduced by the Conservative Government in 1984, unions not only have to ballot their members to set up a Political Fund but also have to vote every ten years on whether or not to keep the Political Fund. This is the third round of ballots. The last two rounds were a massive success. We hope to get an even better result this time.

If I vote Yes does it mean I have to pay more?

No. In fact, every member has the right to opt out of paying into the Political Fund whenever they want. A Yes vote just means that the FBU keeps its Political Fund, so you keep your right to choose.

If I don't want to pay the political levy, why should I vote Yes?

Voting Yes means that those members who wish to pay into the Political Fund can continue to do so. It does not mean you begin to pay into the Political Fund. Every member of the union, political levy payers and non-payers alike, has a vote to decide whether or not to keep the Political Fund working for members. If you don't want to contribute to the Political Fund, you don't have to – you have the right to opt in or out of paying the levy whenever you want. It is important, though, that you vote, and that you vote Yes, so that all members can benefit from the FBU's political campaigning.

Who can vote in this ballot?

All members of the union, whether they pay the political levy or not.

How do I vote?

The ballot paper will be sent to your home unless you ask for it to be sent to another address.

You should read the ballot paper and vote Yes if you agree to keep FBU's Political Fund. It must be posted back to the Independent Scrutineer. A pre-paid return envelope will be included with the ballot paper.

What if my ballot paper doesn't arrive?

If you have not received a ballot paper three weeks before the close of the ballot contact Head Office. Have your membership details to hand.

Is it a secret ballot?

Yes, completely secret.

What happens if the FBU loses the ballot?

The FBU would lose the ability to campaign effectively on issues like better pensions, better public services and better health and safety laws.

I'm not really interested in politics. Why should I vote Yes?

Because the law defines many ordinary campaigns (such as campaigns for better laws, better pensions, better public services and better health and safety laws) as having a 'political purpose'. A Yes vote keeps your right to choose whether or not to contribute to the Political Fund.

What can I do to help the campaign?

To help the FBU win a Yes vote, you can organise a seminar or briefing session for your workplace or union branch. Materials can be downloaded from www.fbu.org.uk